

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

NOVEMBER—DECEMBER, 1921

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS THE REALI- SATION OF WORLD-PEACE

NATIONS have always been endeavouring to establish a peaceful state, but unfortunately they have ever been led to a course of strife and struggle, and the latest culmination of all this, whatever reasonable excuses they have had, was the recent world-war. Everybody, whether directly concerned with it or remaining merely as a by-stander, was amazed to watch how extensively and how complicated the war grew as it progressed year after year. The evils that were sown in its trail were incalculably great and we have not yet been able to wipe them out. The war indeed deserved the name of a world-war; while it was progressing we did not have time enough to reflect on it, we were too dazed. But with its conclusion our minds began to think about it, about its causes, its consequences, and if possible, the way to prevent its recurrence in future. We now fully realise how wrong we have been in the choice of our pathway to real civilisation.

It must be said that the price we have paid for this our awakening to the true state of affairs was an immensely high one; for we had to pay for it with a great part of world-wealth and the sacrifice of many millions of human lives. We have thus been enabled to think about the reconstruction of human life in its various aspects. One of the most signi-

ficant propositions suggested and now in the process of putting it in practice was that of insuring permanent peace of the whole world. The Washington Conference in session at present is supposed to settle the question of disarmament in all the nations situated along the Pacific Ocean, but it is really concerned with the question of a world peace too. Some think that such a movement has so far never borne any practical and tangible fruit, and therefore that it is a mistake to expect much of the Washington Conference. But in our opinion the desire for a world-peace is deep-seated in the human heart, and it is quite natural for us to avail ourselves of every opportunity that is likely to ensure the desideratum.

My sincerest desire is that all the statesmen and diplomats and representatives who are directly concerned with the Conference will have a thorough understanding as to the inner significance of such an international gathering and will exert themselves to the utmost to bring about a peace based on the permanent principles of justice and humanity. All those who have either witnessed or heard of the calamities of the War must be realising now, some in a reasoned way and others more or less unconsciously, that "this will never do," that "something ought to be done to remedy this state of things." Whatever this is, the highest ideal of humanity, the ultimate goal of human life must be the peace of the whole world established on the principle of love. This was already held up as the aim of human intercourse by the ancient sages when the world was still young and the extent of civilisation was geographically limited. However, as the facilities of communication were quite undeveloped, wars were often the means of international intercourse; while the result did not always justify the means, there were times when war produced a beneficial influence in the development of national culture. But the last war has most conclusively proved that the end of human life is not the material prosperity or im-

perialistic absolutism of one nation to be enjoyed over all the other nations. If this is so, if this is surely going to produce a result, the price we have paid in the recent war cannot be said to be too high.

In truth, as long as our aim of life was the accumulation of material wealth and the aggrandisement of power, no peace could be attained on earth, no kingdom could be established among human beings. As long as Germany representing militarism and absolutism jeopardised international harmony, she could not be allowed to continue her threatening existence. But there are some who regard Japan as a second Germany in the East ready to disturb the peace of the Pacific. According to them, Japan has no real religion, no national culture worth the world's admiration, her people are only fond of fighting, and to have such a neighbour is disquieting. This is some of the criticism, maliciously or ignorantly, going its round among nations. There is some truth in this criticism, we have to admit, as far as our annual naval and military expenditure is concerned, which has steadily increased ever since the conclusion of the two great wars Japan was obliged to engage in in recent years. To charge Japan as militaristic just because she has had to devote a large part of her revenues to her defence is quite unjust. The critics ought to know better if they want to be fair. That Japan has no aggressive programme in her foreign relations, or that at least the enlightened and influential elements of her people loathe any kind of military demonstration; for they are well aware that Japan alone cannot stop the progress of the world based on the principles of justice and truth.

Whatever development Japan has achieved during the past fifty years, we confess, has been somewhat abnormal and not along the line of the culture that has been steadily acquired and persistently maintained by our ancestors. By this we mean the recent progress of Japan so called and so wondered

at by other nations as something phenomenal in the history of a nation has been along the line of materialism, and does not represent the true spirit and aspirations of the people. The latter had been too dazzled by the industrial prosperity and material achievements of the West when they first came in contact with them, and went even so far as to abandon all her possessions moral and spiritual; their efforts have ever since been concentrated in acquiring all that the West excelled in these things. Materialism is however the curse of modern civilisation, and Japan has not been behind in getting its full share, inevitably together with its baneful consequences. We have now grown conscious of all these defects so glaringly thrust into our view. We have now begun to go back to the original track of our own civilisation, unspoiled by modern commercialism. This fact is readily seen in various fields of our life by any one whose eyes are clear enough to see into its inward spirit.

In every Japanese city, in every Japanese village, however humble, one comes across the temple buildings dedicated to the spirit of the founder of Buddhism, the teaching of which is peace not only within oneself but all over the world, which in fact but reflects the lives of its component individuals. Except those that are too heavily drunk in modern industrialism one will pay deep respect to the monuments of peace. The Buddha teaches us how to live on earth: "O you, my disciples, you should be upright in your behaviours, honour holy ones, respect good people, be compassionate and loving, fulfil the teachings of the Buddha, and for the sake of the salvation of the world cut the root of the birth-and-death and that of all evils." The spirit of peace was expressed by the Buddha in the following passage: "Wherever the Buddha wanders, whether in the city or in the village, there is nothing that is not benefitted by his teachings: harmony prevails on earth, the heavenly bodies shine bright, the wind and rain

keep their seasons, an epidemic never rages, annual yields are abundant, the people enjoy peace, no warlike demonstrations take place, the virtuous are respected, the benevolent are honoured, and rules of propriety are observed."

This spirit of peace and harmony has prevailed in Japan more than one thousand and three hundred years now, and even the people who are cringingly kneeling before the idols created by modern civilisation are unconsciously moved by the gentle, peace-loving, and highly idealistic sons of Gautama Buddha when they come to experience a spiritual crisis. These facts show how penetratingly Buddhism has planted its roots in the breasts of the people of the Rising Sun. Abnormal conditions may prevail for a while, but they are not strong enough to destroy all the virtues so persistently cultivated by the peaceful propagators of the Buddhist doctrines. With the termination of the recent war this idealistic tendency has begun to assert itself more vigorously than ever, and we all know where really lies the mission of Japanese culture in the world.

It is difficult to prophesy just how things will shape themselves at the Washington Conference, but in our point of view this is immaterial if all those men of eminence, each in his own fields, who are directly taking part in the Conference and in whose hands is entrusted the final settlement of international relations, fully realise the spiritual meaning of such a motion set agoing by the President of the United States of America and exhibit the spirit of justice, harmony, and sincerity in all their dealing with one another. Even when they come to a final settlement as to the disarmament plans, the Conference moving in the spirit just referred to must be said to be a great advance on the old diplomacy whose principle was trickery. We must not forget that all religion standing on the platform of universal brotherhood watches over the Conference, and that if this one fails to

bring any practical result, another will be called out before long, and we will never stop short until the goal is attained not only in our inner life but in all our relations with the world at large.

Recently, the material progress of the world has been really overwhelming to such an extent even as to overshadow the significance of the spiritual side of human life; but the latter can never be ignored or silenced, for when the time ripens it is sure to raise its head and unmistakably express its will. And there is no doubt that we are now approaching such a time; do we not hear the cry: "Enough with materialism and naturalism"? To be rich, to be comfortable, to be powerful and overbearing,—this does not cover the whole field of human aspirations. Far from it; but let us now be more humane, more considerate of others, more brotherly to one another, and let the strength of a nation be measured by these virtues and not by the number of battleships and the thoroughness of military equipments.

KWŌYEN OTANI.